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## *Lord of the Flies: An Analysis*

By E. C. BUFKIN

WILLIAM Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is about evil; and it recounts a quest for order amidst the disorder that evil causes. Golding has said that the theme of the novel "is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable." Theme and moral are worked out through an adaptation of the Christian myth of the Fall of Man, which has been overlaid with what may be termed the myth of the desert island. Since Golding is a serious student of Greek, and has stated that Euripides is one of his literary influences, it is not surprising that in *Lord of the Flies* the principal technical device he uses is irony. It, like the myth of fallen man, permeates the novel. The presence of the myth has been duly noted by critics but, though commentators have perceived and incidentally remarked on a wide variety of ironies in the novel, almost none, with the notable exception of John Peter, has so far recognized that *Lord of the Flies*, piercing through illusion and appearance to truth and reality, is essentially an ironical novel. Recognition of this is basic to any analysis of the work, providing as it does the key to both the author's development of theme and his handling of his subject-matter.

Indeed, of two of the major literary influences on *Lord of the Flies*, one, R. M. Ballantyne's adventure story *The Coral Island*, serves a chiefly ironical purpose. The exact nature of that influence has been established by Golding himself in an interview with Frank Kermode. Asked whether his novel is not a "kind of black mass version of Ballantyne," Golding replied that it is not: "I think," he said, "it is, in fact, a realistic view of the Ballantyne situation." When further asked "just how far and how ironically we ought to treat" the connection between the two books, Golding gave an illuminating reply about the origin of his novel:

Well, I think, fairly deeply, but again, not ironically in the bad sense, but in almost a compassionate sense. You see, really, I'm getting at

myself in this. What I'm saying to myself is "don't be such a fool, you remember when you were a boy, a small boy, how you lived on that island with Ralph and Jack and Peterkin" (who is Simon, by the way, Simon called Peter, you see. It was worked out very carefully in every possible way[.] this novel). I said to myself finally, "Now you are grown up, you are adult, it's taken you a long time to become adult, but now you've got there you can see that people are not like that; they would not behave like that if they were God-fearing English gentlemen, and they went to an island like that." Their savagery would not be found in natives on an island. As like as not they would find savages who were kindly and uncomplicated and that the devil would rise out of the intellectual complications of the three white men on the island itself.

Ballantyne's book, to which Golding refers in this comment, is about an "agreeable triumvirate" of boys who are marooned on a coral reef in the South Seas: Ralph, the narrator of the story; Jack, their "king"; and Peterkin. Survivors of a "frightful" shipwreck during a "dreadful" storm, they explore the island, which they think must be "the ancient paradise," and, making the best of their situation, lead a happy and orderly life there, hunting hogs, eating fruit, and exploring. "There was, indeed," says Ralph, "no note of discord whatever in the symphony we played together on that sweet Coral Island; and I am now persuaded that this was owing to our having been all tuned to the same key, namely, that of *love*! Yes, we loved one another with much fervency, while we lived on that island; and, for the matter of that, we love each other still." This much of the plot is what Golding used; he neglected the later episodes that deal with pirates and cannibals. But it was just this much of the plot that must have seemed false, or unrealistic, to Golding.

Although neither appreciation nor understanding of *Lord of the Flies* is dependent upon familiarity with *The Coral Island*, the reader acquainted with Ballantyne's work can better see what Golding has done in his own novel. The person who knows both stories is aware of the contrast between them, and knows that the contrast is, in effect and purpose, ironical. It resides in the discrepancy between the falseness, or unreality, of his source, as Golding sees it, and the truth, or reality, of *Lord of the Flies*. Golding must surely have had this juxtaposition in mind, else he would not have so carefully duplicated in his own novel details from Ballantyne's.

A second major literary influence on *Lord of the Flies*, an influence that no critic has noted before, despite its almost glaring presence, is *Paradise Lost*. The epic and the novel have a common theme, the Fall of Man; and it is altogether feasible that Golding, in paralleling in *Lord of the Flies* situations highly similar to those in *Paradise Lost*, meant to enrich and to enlarge, by associative suggestion, the scope of his narrative.

The first of these parallels is the setting. Golding's island, like Milton's Eden, represents the original earthly paradise where occurs the Fall of Man. That the island is meant to represent this paradise is easily deduced from the following sentence: "The forest re-echoed; and birds lifted, crying out of the tree-tops, as on that first morning ages ago." And it is quite possible also that the killing of the sow, to which the boys are "wedded in lust," may itself, since the passage is presented in terms of sexual intercourse, function as a symbolic, parodic re-enactment of the Original Sin:

... the sow fell and the hunters hurled themselves at her. This dreadful eruption from an unknown world made her frantic; she squealed and bucked and the air was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror. Roger ran round the heap, prodding with his spear whenever pigflesh appeared. Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife. Roger found a lodgment for his point and began to push till he was leaning with his whole weight. The spear moved forward inch by inch and the terrified squealing became a high-pitched scream. Then Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands. The sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her.

These two passages may be said to deal with the natural aspects of the Fall—the natural world and, in it, man. Other passages paralleling incidents in *Paradise Lost* may be said, in contrast, to be based on the supernatural. In the one, Golding's boys represent the earliest man and his Fall in Eden; in the second, they represent the fallen angels, or devils, and the island is Hell. Golding makes clear that Jack and the choirboys are devils—fallen angels. Curiously, no critic has commented on why they are choirboys and not just ordinary schoolboys. Golding, having "worked out very carefully in every possible way this novel," certainly had a definite purpose in making them so. Even though the concept of angels as singers is both traditional and common, Golding points out the connection between the boys and angels explicitly. He says that "ages ago"—a repeated phrase connecting the

singing boys and the singing birds of "that first morning"—the boys "had stood in two demure rows and their voices had been the song of angels." A double irony is at work here. The phrase means that the boys, who are devils, sang *like* angels and also that they sang songs of angels; that is, liturgic chants which, on the island, undergo pagan and savage metamorphosis into "*Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in!*" (which Golding terms a "chant" rising "ritually").

In *Paradise Lost* the angels fall from Heaven while war is raging there, and Golding has duplicated this situation, too; for the plane carrying the boys is attacked and shot down during a war. In fact, war is the very cause of their being there, just as it is the cause of the angels' fall from Heaven. Thus while the island the boys land on is an emblem of Paradise, it is ironically also an emblem of Hell, complete with the traditional fire (watching which, Piggy "glanced nervously into hell"). And there is also a presiding demoniac god, the Lord of the Flies—Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils.

Finally, in *Lord of the Flies* the boys, all of them, assemble, exchange names (perhaps a parallel to the roll-call of the infernal host), hold a council, elect a leader, and explore the island. These are the same acts, and they occur in the same order, that the fallen angels perform in Milton's Hell. Ironically, not Jack, who is "the most obvious leader," but Ralph, who is "no devil," is chosen. But since the movement of the plot is toward the emergence of evil in the boys and its gradual domination of them, it is, fittingly, not long before Ralph's position is usurped by Jack, who finally leads the now savage tribe of boys with their "anonymous devils' faces" and sits in the midst of them "like an idol." (This movement may be viewed, further, as a correspondence to Satan's securing of power in the world.)

The story of *Lord of the Flies* is told from the omniscient point of view. Golding as narrator shifts from one boy to another, among the major characters, telling each one's thoughts and decisions, explaining his motivations and reactions, or seeing a situation with his perspective; and at the very end he shifts away from the boys to their adult rescuer. Occasionally, at certain crucial times when the context of the novel calls for an objective, uninvolved voice to be heard as the voice of truth, Golding stands back from the action and comments unobtrusively on the situation. For the most part, however, the story develops through dramatic action and dialogue, not through authorial exposition and comment; and this method contrasts with the moralizing

first-person narration of *The Coral Island*, which Golding is "correcting." He perhaps felt that readers familiar with the Ballantyne story would be aware of this contrast. Instead of telling, then, Golding is showing; and the difference in this technique is as significant as the contrast between the two writers' attitudes toward their material.

The omniscient point of view is another device for widening the scope of the novel, for obviously a part of the whole plan of the narrative is that the attitudes of each of the four principal characters—Ralph, Jack, Piggy, Simon—be included. This particular point of view—the omniscient—is, furthermore, appropriate and important to the novel in that it can control and unify both what happens on the island and what is happening in the world surrounding it. This fictional device is capable of producing an over-all irony that another device could hardly so economically and directly create. The identification of the dead parachutist, for instance, and the information about where he comes from and why, would be impossible without the omniscient point of view; and the kind of irony that derives from the contrast between the reader's knowledge of the true situation and the characters' ignorance of it would have been otherwise unobtainable.

One of the most arresting features of the structure of *Lord of the Flies* is that, though it develops as a chronologically straight narrative, it is actually bipartite, Chapters I-IX forming one part, the last three chapters (X-XII) forming the other. Thematically, an important point is subtly made by this division. The first part shows the boys in a state of innocence, and the second shows them in a primitive state of evil. What is not immediately perceived is that in the second part the boys are placed in situations almost identical to situations in the first part (notably those created by storm and by fire). In their changed state, however, the boys react to the situations entirely differently; and the second part thus functions as a concentrated, contrasting re-statement of much of the material of the first part of the novel.

This contrast points directly to the theme of the novel: the loss of innocence is the acquisition of the knowledge of evil, which corrupts man and darkens his heart. Movement of plot from innocence to evil is thus thematically vertical, not horizontal; it is a re-enactment of the Fall and its consequences. In support of the theme Golding continually uses words of downward motion. The opening sentence itself sets in motion this running verbal motif: "The boy with fair hair lowered himself down the last few feet of rock. . . ." The boys



are “dropped” from the sky. The parachutist is a sign come “down from the world of grown-ups,” and later his corpse “swayed down through a vastness of wet air . . . ; falling, still falling, it sank towards the beach. . . .” Simon, after his hallucinatory conversation with the Lord of the Flies, “fell down and lost consciousness” and, when killed, he “fell over the steep edge of the rock” and the orgiastically excited boys surged after him and “poured down the rock,” whereupon “the clouds opened and let down the rain like a waterfall.” Piggy, hit by the rock, “fell forty feet,” and Ralph weeps for “the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.” In the last episode of the novel the naval officer is introduced while “looking down at Ralph in wary astonishment.” These are but a few of the many examples that run through the novel, suggesting the spiritual fall through words of physical action and direction.

This motif might actually be considered imagistic, one of the intricate network of interrelated symbols and images that, composing the texture of *Lord of the Flies*, enlarge and universalize its meaning. At least four such systems are prominent: cosmic symbols that transform the island into an emblem of the world, or universe, in miniature; symbols pertaining to order and reason and their opposites, supplemented by an ancillary group of head images; animal images that connote the degradation of the boys from the human to the bestial level; and “play” images that trace the ironical change from childhood games to deadly reality.

The cosmic symbolism is established at the beginning when the boys are dropped on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Golding draws on a long-established tradition by making the island “roughly boat-shaped”; and thus, as C. B. Cox has stated in elaborating on this fact, “the children typify all mankind on their journey through life.” The island as a ship is, then, a symbol of the world in microcosm; it is to the boys, as first man, the Garden of Paradise or, as fallen angels, Hell. Thus boys are not only boys but men, Man, and angels.

Golding draws upon another traditional cosmic symbol, the storm, to reflect in the realm of nature the evil or chaotic doings in the world of man. A storm accompanies the confused landing of the boys on the island; and later another storm develops in gradual stages that parallel those leading up to the boys’ feast and slaughter of Simon. On the day of these climactic actions “the sky, as if in sympathy with the great changes among them [the boys], was different . . . and

so misty that in some places the hot air seemed white." After the slaughter of the sow, "high up among the bulging clouds thunder went off like a gun," and later "the thunder boomed again." In the next chapter, "over the island the build-up of clouds" continues, and when the boys eat their kill they do so "beneath a sky of thunderous brass that rang with the storm-coming." After Jack's sneering declaration that the conch no longer counts, "all at once the thunder struck. Instead of the dull boom there was a point of impact in the explosion." The thunder becomes more violent as the boys become more violent and wild in their dance; and the dark sky, also, becomes "shattered" by "blue-white scar[s]." Then at last, after Simon has been killed, "the clouds opened and let down the rain. . . ."

The island is further represented as microcosm through the presence of all the four elements—earth, air, fire, water. The storm itself represents a warring interplay of them all. The island—earth—is of course surrounded by the other three. But in addition earth is present as the clay with which the boys paint their faces. Fire is present as signal, hearth and comfort, and destructive force. And water and air are the elements from which the boys believe the beast comes. The dead airman, whom they finally think to be the beast, comes from the air but is carried away, by the wind, to the sea.

The three central symbols, in addition to fire (which is related to them), refer to concepts of order-and-reason and disorder-and-unreason. These, primary symbols pertaining to the quest for order that is necessary for life, are the conch and Piggy's glasses, and the pig's head. The conch, Golding makes clear, is a symbol of order and reason; it represents the voice of authority, at first heeded then flouted. Furthermore, it is an object of great beauty (a traditional attribute of order), having a "delicate, embossed pattern." (Ominously, the breakdown of order is foreshadowed by the remark made when the conch is first discovered: "Careful! You'll break it——") The conch is sounded for meetings, and at them only the holder of the conch has the right to speak. Toward the end of the novel Piggy and Ralph confront the others and make a final attempt to re-establish some form of order. Piggy, holding the conch, tries to appeal to the others' sense of reason; but he is greeted by booing. Then, "with a sense of delirious abandonment," Roger causes a great rock to crash down upon Piggy and, when it hits him, "the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist." In other words, order, rational behavior, and be-



nevolent authority have been completely smashed on the island: the quest has failed.

Piggy's glasses, functioning similarly as the conch, are a symbol of reason, fittingly worn by the thinker of the group. One side of them is eventually broken in a scuffle following the failure of the passing ship to see any smoke on the island; later the remaining lens is stolen in a night raid led by Jack. The breaking and losing of the glasses indicates, symbolically, the breakdown of visionary reason. Piggy's resulting blindness corresponds to the darkness of eclipsing unreason. He is led, finally, by Ralph to the "fort" to try to recover from Jack the stolen lens, in a symbolic episode. But Piggy does not regain even his half-sight; instead he is thrown into the great final darkness of death, since during this scene he is killed.

The fates of the conch and of the glasses, like their functions, are thus related to each other—and to Piggy: all are ultimately broken. Both conch and glasses serve practical purposes (as Piggy does also) on the island; the conch preserves order and the glasses serve as the means for lighting the fire necessary to rescue. After order, concretized in the conch, is finally shattered, the remaining lens yet serves a further purpose: Jack and his cohorts use it to make the fire in their pursuit of Ralph. The fire not only smokes out Ralph but also attracts the attention of the passing cruiser. The misapplication—or iniquitous application—of reason is thus made, ironically, to serve the ends that right reason itself was unable to bring about.

The spiked pig's head is, of course, the symbol of paramount interest. The head is stuck on a stick as a placatory offering to the beast, which the boys mistakenly believe in their fear to be the dead parachutist; it is termed by Golding a gift for darkness. This object is the Lord of the Flies, and it is a repulsive sight: "dim-eyed, grinning faintly, blood blackening between the teeth." Its half-shut eyes are "dim with the infinite cynicism of adult life," and they assure Simon that everything is "a bad business." The butterflies desert the open place where "the obscene thing grinned and dripped," but the flies, "black and iridescent green and without number," swarm buzzingly around it. To Simon the object declares, ". . . I'm the Beast," and then continues:

"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! . . . You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? . . . I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?"

The beast appeals to fear, not reason, and promises the disorder of pleasure. To Simon it says:

"I'm warning you. I'm going to get angry. D'you see? You're not wanted. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island! So don't try it on, my poor misguided boy, or else——"

The Lord of the Flies, then, is darkness—the embodiment and voice of evil and the demoniac. It is Beelzebub, lord of the flies and dung, the Prince of Devils. And it is the beast—the beast that is part of all men. The materialization of this devil coincides with the emergence of savage evil in the boys, revealed in the acts that they commit.

Cephalic imagery supports the theme of irrationality as evil and, importantly, the head, the center of reason, of each of the four major characters figures conspicuously in the plot. Through this imagery Golding depicts the breakdown of rational processes and rational control indirectly. Ralph stands on his head in moments of happiness or elation (which are few). This antic act he performs in the opening scene; as evil emerges and happiness disappears, Ralph significantly discontinues the act. Along with Piggy he is the main upholder of order on the island, and this inverted position of his is an anticipation of the routing of authority and the degradation of reason. Piggy's bespectacled head, the source of reasonable planning, breaks open after his fall—"His head opened and stuff came out and turned red." After this event right reason no longer exists; for this fall destroys the conch and, by splitting his head, kills Piggy. Jack's easy descent to savagery is indicated by his decoration of his face with colored clay; and when he smudges blood over his forehead the gesture is, as Claire Rosenfield has pointed out, a kind of pagan initiation "in which the hunter's face is smeared with the blood of his first kill." Thus Jack progresses, in descent, through the stages outlined by Piggy in his inquiry, "What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages?" The human Jack, disguising his head, tends to appear, and then to act, like an animal; and then, after wiping blood on his head, he becomes, through the releasing of the animal urges within, totally savage. His painted face becomes a mask behind which he hides, "liberated from shame and self-consciousness." Simon's head undergoes pain and illusion during the episode of his colloquy with the Lord of the Flies. The change begins with a throb: "In Simon's right temple, a pulse began

to beat on the brain." His head, having been tilted slightly up, now begins to wobble, and it seems to him that the Lord of the Flies "was expanding like a balloon." Through this experience Simon, the mystic and saint, arrives at the truth about the beast; and that his reason is intuitive, not really rational, is signalized by the fainting fit that affects his head. Moreover, Simon, as saint, is an obvious contrast to the Lord of the Flies as Prince of Devils. Just as the shiny filth-loving flies circle the dead pig's head, so the "strange, moonbeamed-bodied creatures with fiery eyes" in the sea—their effectiveness heightened by the lack of more specific identification—busy themselves halo-like around Simon's head. Finally, Golding indicates the disorder through head imagery by describing the unkempt, ever-growing hair on all the boys' heads but Piggy's:

He was the only boy on the island whose hair never seemed to grow. The rest were shock-headed, but Piggy's hair still lay in wisps over his head as though baldness were his natural state, and this imperfect covering would soon go. . . .

The pig's head is, of course, the principal symbol in this category. It is the ironic antithesis of reason, since (being a head, the seat of reason) it appeals, through fear, to the emotions or passions. It speaks "in the voice of a schoolmaster" and teaches a diabolically perverted lesson. It has promised fun; but the fun of darkness leads to death. In the last chapter the pig's head has actually become the traditional symbol of death—a skull. The ingenuity of Golding's handling of both symbolism and irony is evidenced in his linking the opposites, conch and pig's skull, in this passage:

At length he [Ralph] came to a clearing in the forest where rock prevented vegetation from growing. Now it was a pool of shadows and Ralph nearly flung himself behind a tree when he saw something standing in the centre; but then he saw that the white face was bone and that the pig's skull grinned at him from the top of a stick. He walked slowly into the middle of the clearing and looked steadily at the skull that gleamed as white as ever the conch had done and seemed to jeer at him cynically. An inquisitive ant was busy in one of the eye sockets but otherwise the thing was lifeless.

The animal imagery is thus related to the symbolism of reason-unreason by means of the pig's head. The animal is, of course, distinguished from the human by the reasoning faculty, which it lacks; and a human's loss of this faculty reduces him to the bestial level.

Through the use of animal imagery Golding is able to keep constantly before the reader the motif of degeneration, the changing from the reasoning human to the unreasoning animal state. Ralph explicitly tells the other boys, by way of warning, that "we'll soon be animals" and the prediction becomes a reality. (The animal imagery thus acts also as a foreshadowing device.) The boys are associated as agents of evil with flies through the use of the words *buzz* and *hum*, for they buzz and hum at meetings. And, as if to prefigure their change, the children are depicted by animal images. They cast "bat-like" shadows, sit like "black birds," and run round "like insects." They howl and pant "like dogs," point like setters, and steam like seals. Even Ralph eats "like a wolf" and terms himself, Piggy, and Simon "three blind mice." Jack in particular is described with such imagery. As hunter, he becomes doglike, "down like a sprinter, his nose only a few inches from the humid earth," "on all fours." He is swallowed up by the animal "compulsion to track down and kill," and his laughter as a "bloodthirsty snarling." He is "ape-like," and Ralph terms him a "swine." Ironically, Piggy himself is compared to pigs, besides being mocked by a pig nickname. When struck and killed by the rock, he has "no time for even a grunt" and his "arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed." In the last chapter the animal imagery is climaxed. The chased Ralph thinks as a chased pig must think and, significantly, the boys hunting him become a pack of animals. (To the naval officer they are "a pack of British boys.") Golding makes this identification through the repetitive use of the word, in its several forms, *ululate*, which means to howl like a dog or a wolf. The angels' chant has now become the cacophonous cry of the hunters. The emergence of the animal is now universal.

The fourth system of imagery traces the transition from the "fun" of the boys' games to horrible reality—the "fun" predicted by the Lord of the Flies. These games are childish amusements at first—"a time when play was good and life so full that hope was not necessary and therefore forgotten"—but gradually they become tinged with cruelty and violence. Moreover, the majority of the boys cannot grasp the seriousness of such matters as maintaining the fire; building it is to them merely an opportunity for a "good time" and they fancy themselves re-enacting *Treasure Island*, *Swallows and Amazons*, and *The Coral Island*.

Soon they play at pig-hunting, and Robert, who gets hurt acting

the role of pig, appreciates the difference between pretending and reality. "Oh, my bum!" he moans with "frightened snivels," and tells the others, while "still caressing his rump," "You want a real pig . . . because you've got to kill him." But to Jack this is "a good game." The episode is a foreshadowing of the killing of the sow and also of the murder of Simon, each episode of the sequence being more savage and more evil than the one preceding it.

Finally Jack declares an end to the good games after the others will not agree to his replacing Ralph as leader: "I'm not going to play any longer." Soon afterward Ralph too puts an end to play, for he has realized that "being rescued isn't a game"—although he has long before realized that the councils should "not be fun, but business."

After the murder of Piggy the innocent games have become a seriously evil reality. When Ralph is pursued, the boys only pretend to pretend; their avowed intention is to kill him. And they would have succeeded had the naval officer not appeared. He speaks as authority; yet what he says is one of the most tragically ironic lines in the novel: "'Fun and games,' said the officer." The imagery has run its course and has done so in a circle. Adult authority with its rules has restored order and ended the reality-game of the children. The situation has accordingly been returned to "normal"; but the purpose of *Lord of the Flies* is to show that boys are not so innocently "normal" as, when restricted by authority, they appear to be.

The balance of structure of *Lord of the Flies* is reflected in the balance of the four principal boys, and the imagery is employed as a means of characterization. Ralph and Jack, conflicting contrasts, represent the principles of good and evil; and Piggy and Simon, also contrasts but not conflicting, represent the principles of reason, logical and intuitive. The personalities of these boys are worked out carefully along these sharply marked lines.

Ralph has the requirements to be the hero and the representative of good. He has the traditionally fair hair of the good man, the attractive appearance, and the ability of genuine leadership. He is the largest as well as the oldest of the boys; and he "might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went." In addition, and importantly, he has a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaims him "no devil."

Yet Ralph, it should be noted, can possess only a limited goodness, since he is "ordinary bestial man," tainted with Original Sin. Like

all the other boys he participates in the killing of Simon; but unlike them he is aware—and deeply bothered by the fact—that “that was murder.” Nonetheless, Ralph is a boy of high standards and noble purpose, and he is the most forceful link with the authority of the adult world.

For this reason Ralph is the principal quester for order. He is not a thinker, but he possesses a practical intelligence, imagination, and reverence for order (he feels “a kind of affectionate reverence for the conch”). His great natural gift is to lead. And, though he must execute the plans that the more intelligent person (usually Piggy) might conceive, Ralph appreciates that “thought was a valuable thing, that got results.”

Golding has developed Ralph more fully than any of the other boys. The reader learns that, when pleased, Ralph stands on his head; when agitated or worried, he bites his nails. His past is sketched: he remembers a cottage on the edge of the moors and, at the bottom of the garden, the wild ponies that came to the stone wall where he fed them sugar. His father is a commander in the Royal Navy. And Ralph is given to daydreaming.

Jack is his opposite. He is “the brilliant world of hunting, tactics, fierce exhilaration, skill”; Ralph, “the world of longing and baffled common-sense.” They are “two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate.” Jack is tall, thin, bony: in a word, ugly. He is the evil man, the boy devil. He is associated with Satan through his red hair; his anger, rage, and cursing; and the snake and swine images applied to him. Of all the boys he is the most obvious leader, having been chapter chorister and head boy. He is arrogant and knows his own mind; and his forceful personality exerts itself through proud jealousy of Ralph’s position as leader. Jack is the principal culprit in consciously disobeying, ignoring, and finally abrogating the rules that have been established for the benefit, and possible rescue, of all. The most feral, as well as the leading savage (the “Chief”), of the boys, he sets up his own laws. Demonic order thus replaces good order.

Piggy is, perhaps, the most visually vivid of the boys. He is fat, clumsy, wears heavy spectacles, and is asthmatic. He does not like to work. He is the thinker on the island; to him life is “scientific.” The function of sticks, he believes, should be to make a clock (a sundial), not spears. He possesses, as Ralph says, intellectual daring and can discount certain matters “learnedly.” Ralph recognizes, like a wise



leader, this quality: "Piggy could think. He could go step by step inside that fat head of his, only Piggy was no chief. But Piggy, for all his ludicrous body, had brains." Thus Piggy and Ralph are complements, as Jack and Ralph are contrasts.

Piggy (along with Ralph and Simon) has much respect for decorum, that observance of proprieties established by social authority and reason. When he becomes "a-bubble" with excitement, the excitement is "decorous"; but even he can on occasion be "shocked out of decorum" and say "Nuts!" He warns the others that they cannot expect to be rescued if they "don't put first things first and act proper." Both his first appearance in the novel and his last are breaches of decorum. The first is humorous. Just after appearing and meeting Ralph, Piggy reveals that he is suffering from diarrhea ("Them fruit," he says) and must leave his new-found companion to crouch "down among the tangled foliage." His last appearance is pathetic. Knocked roughly to his death over a cliff, he twitches like a pig, the fat boy who disliked his name, Piggy.

Simon, according to Golding, is a saint. Small and skinny, with a pointed chin and very bright eyes, he is subject to epileptic fits. He is filled with compassion. He finds Piggy's glasses when they are, the first time, knocked off, and he is the littluns' favorite bigun. To the critics who find Simon the weakest aspect of the novel, an unconvincing portrait, Golding has answered:

What so many intelligent people and particularly, if I may say so, so many literary people find, is that Simon is incomprehensible. But, he *is* comprehensible to the illiterate person. The illiterate person knows about saints and sanctity, and Simon is a saint.

And then he continues:

You see, a saint isn't just a scapegoat, a saint is somebody who in the last analysis voluntarily embraces his fate, which is a pretty sticky one, and he is for the illiterate a proof of the existence of God because the illiterate person who is not brought up on logic and not brought up always to hope for the worst, says, "Well, a person like this cannot exist without a good God." Therefore the illiterate person finds Simon extremely easy to understand, someone who voluntarily embraces this beast[,] goes . . . and tries to get rid of him and goes to give the good news to the ordinary bestial man on the beach, and gets killed for it.

With an amazing exactness Ralph, Jack, Piggy, and Simon all fit into Jung's classification of psychological types, set forth in *Modern*

*Man in Search of a Soul*. These are sensation and intuition, which Jung terms essentially non-rational, and thinking and feeling, which he terms rational. He characterizes these types in this way: "When we think, it is in order to judge or to reach a conclusion, and when we feel it is in order to attach a proper value to something; sensation and intuition, on the other hand, are perceptive—they make us aware of what is happening, but do not interpret or evaluate it. They do not act selectively according to principles, but are simply receptive of what happens."

According to this scheme, Simon represents the intuition-type since intuition is "perception by way of unconscious contents and connections" and "points to the possibilities of the whence and whither that lie within the immediate facts." This definition helps clarify Simon's perception that the beast is "only us"; and it also helps explain Simon's conversation in delirium with the Lord of the Flies, his discovery of the true identity of the parachute-entwined "beast" on the mountain, and his going to the other boys to tell them about that discovery.

Jack represents the sensation-type, sensation being "perception through conscious sensory processes," that which "establishes what is actually given." Thus he sees pigs and wants to hunt them. When the littluns become afraid of the beast, Jack reassures them by declaring that, if one does exist, they will hunt it down and kill it.

Piggy is the thinking-type, the man of thought, not action. Ralph is the feeling-type: for "thinking enables us to recognize" the meaning of what is actually given, and "feeling tells us its value." These two, then, are both rational, according to Jung's scheme, and so are complementary. Ralph, for instance, has affection for the conch, but it is Piggy who first perceives its meaning: "We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They'll come when they hear us——" he says.

The effect of this comprehensive representation of the four psychological types of men is the creation of the impression that *Lord of the Flies* concerns not four principal boys in a cruel, violent, bloody story, but rather that the four are merely aspects of one, who is Man himself. Thus all four boys' points of view have been presented and combined by the omniscient narrator. And the devices of point of view and characterization integrate to turn the story of the novel into the Fall of Man and his experiences as he journeys, on the island-ship, through life in this world.

In *Lord of the Flies* Golding has thus created a picture of man's

universal situation, "mankind's essential illness," and has traced the emergence of evil, the result of Original Sin, as man's common mortal inheritance. Like the first man, the boys land on the island in a state of innocence; but, like him, they gradually ignore the voice of authority and violate the rules that have been previously created—by state (king), church (God), family (father)—for order, mutual benefit, and happiness. Thus they enact, paradoxically, their "liberation into savagery": paradoxically, because their freeing is into a state of bondage to evil and undiscipline. Man, whether acting on the psychological, social, political, or Christian level, is most truly free when he is most truly disciplined. When law and rules, simultaneously the accouterments and the guardians of order, are discarded and the private, individual good takes control and precedence over the public, common good, things begin to fall apart, reason and common sense become baffled, and chaos ensues. Man, defying prescribed authority, whether divine or mundane, becomes corrupt; and the "understandable, lawful world," as a result of "intellectual complication," ceases to be a reality. It can only retreat into the memory, whence occasionally in some form—perhaps a daydream of feeding ponies over a wall in the bottom of a garden—it can be recalled.

*Lord of the Flies* depicts universal evil as a beast concept: the boys represent "ordinary bestial man." At first this concept exists in the littluns' subconscious, disturbing their dreams and begetting fear. They believe that the beast is a "snake-thing" and imagine that it goes abroad at night to eat them, turning, in the morning, "into them things like ropes in the trees." Thus the beast is a man-made, man-eating product of general superstition, ignorance, and darkness—out of which it comes and in which it operates. Gradually, however, this beast evinces more tangible proof of its existence; it appears to the children as "a dead man on a hill." But Simon discovers that they are mistaken. To him, the mystic whose knowledge is intuitive, the *real* beast is "only us"; and the Lord of the Flies, a true demonic and comminatory beast, confirms that this identity is correct. Evil, the beast, exists within men, and it is kept within by the authoritative restraints of laws, rules, and knowledge. This internal beast is the beast that cannot be hunted and killed; and this internal beast is the "reason why it's no go" and "things are what they are."

When released, the beast turns man into a savage, and reason is destroyed, both the intuitive type represented by Simon and the logical

type represented by Piggy. Simon sees man as “at once heroic and sick.” All men are sick because they are tainted with the universal disease of Original Sin, first contracted by Adam and passed to all his posterity. But men, though tragically not all, are also heroic in their struggle with this disease. Such men are Ralph, Piggy, and Simon. Simon, like the nursing sow, becomes in his death a sacrificial object to the beast, and the victim of the wanton evil and savagery unleashed in man. Men reject the common sense and reason that a few individuals like Ralph and Piggy try to force beneficially upon them. They also reject the divine truth that saints like Simon, if permitted to be heard, would disclose to them—the divine truth that would really free them from the illusive state of savage liberation. Simon, like his namesake Simon called Peter, seeks to bring truth (the “good news”—the gospel) about a “dead man on a hill” and, also like him, is martyred for the undertaking.

Yet man has the power to choose; he has free control and free exercise of his will. He can accept the real freedom of truth or he can accept the false freedom of savagery. But ironically, as Peter Green suggests, man “cherishes his guilt, his fears, his taboos, and will crucify any saint or redeemer who offers to relieve him of his burden by telling the simple truth.” Thus, as Green has shown, *Lord of the Flies* states that “it is man who creates his own hell, his own devils; the evil is in him.” Such is the message of the Lord of the Flies, echoing its own lord of darkness in *Paradise Lost*:

The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.

Golding has commented:

“The whole book is symbolic in nature except for the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island. The officer, having interrupted a man-hunt, prepares to take the children off the island in a cruiser which will presently be hunting its enemy in the same implacable way. And who will rescue the adult and his cruiser?”

At the end of *Lord of the Flies* Golding employs a technical gimmick by a sudden shift in perspective to make this implicative point. The gimmick shifts the reader’s identity from boys to rescuer, and then, in the same way but taking the procedure one step further, the gimmick

serves to identify the rescuer with the boys and so to sever the reader's identity with any character. Thus the reader is left, at the end, to look at the novel from the outside. The boys' rescuer, heroic and sick like them and all men, is himself now ironically but a boy, decorated with his official insignia just as the children are decorated with clay and charcoal; and he too is engaged in a war. The ending, therefore, is merely another beginning of this mythic story. The final view is then that of the author, the cosmic ironist: not of just an island of boys but of the world of men who pursue the beast and turn paradise into pandemonium.

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## My Mother's Final Gesture

**B**EFORE she left, my mother,  
trying to make it easier for us,  
by slow degrees erased her identity.  
Shedding the little prides and self-defences,  
the patient hopes, the outworn new beginnings,  
she covered with the tenuity of old age  
her beauty, grace, the poor remains of a gaiety  
hoarded against a need that might arise.  
So intent was she  
on divesting herself of all distinctive features,  
she did not heed a word of what we were saying—  
that we were glad she soon would be released  
from the tremors of our perishing civilization,  
the fears and horrors seeping through our walls.  
Barely recognizable at the end,  
except to us who knew her as she was,  
she slipped away  
with a reassuring flutter of her hands.  
We watched her go to her unknown destination,  
then turned to face our own.

—HELENE MULLINS